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Gunnar's War

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Chapter 1 by Fundinn

The smell of burning flesh was everywhere. Gunnar looked on the remains of his village and screamed with rage. His crew looked at the ruination. A few of them called out the names of their loved ones, those from other villages looked worriedly to the boats. Had their homes fared the same?

Gunnar did not need to search the village for his wife. As priestess of the temple she was left as an example. She was hung upside down and naked, her throat slit, her fingers inches above the ground. She was meant to never return to the Earth.

A fluttering and cawing noise drew Gunnar's attention. A hooded figure approached the square, a raven perched on his shoulder.

"Who are you, old man?" Gunnar bristled at the stranger.

"Peace, Gunnar Gylfisson. I mean no harm."

"You know my name?"

"I know many things." Gunnar studied the old man. His clothes were shabby and weather

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What are you? Gunnar had seen many hooded figures in his life, but none like this.

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squawked angrily.

"You saw who attacked our village?"

"No."

"Then what help are you."

"I did not see, but she did," The old man pointed to Gunnar's dead wife, "and she told me."

"How did she--"

"It was your brother, Helgi." Gunnar was stunned. Helgi had become a powerful Jarl, he had many warriors under his control, but they were allies with Loptgard.

"That can't be. Why would he--" The old man reached up and touched Gunnar's head, and suddenly Gunnar could see fire and death. He was running somewhere, but he fell. A hand was on his back and turned him over. Helgi stood over him, a sword in his hand.

"Now I'll finally have you," his voice seemed to come from far away, "You'll like it, Skjadi. I'll make sure of that." Blackness engulfed Gunnar as his brother's laughter echoed in his head. When he opened his eyes again he was in the center of his village again. The old man was standing before him, a look of sadness on his face.

"That is what she showed me." The old man said, gesturing to Gunnar's wife and disturbing the raven again.

Gunnar's crew had gathered around the square, watching the exchange between Gunnar and the old man with trepidation.

Gunnar cut down his wife and started to dig her a grave there in the village square.

"What are you going to do?" The old man asked.

"I will bury my wife, and then I go to Loptgard, to kill my brother." The old man laughed, and it was like the cawing of ravens and the flapping of their wings.

"That is a fight you cannot win." The old man's voice was everywhere.

"And still," Gunnar looked at the empty space the old man had once occupied, "I will see it fought."

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shadow to the old man. Always behind the hooded man, just like his ravens. Aye, there were two of them now, but only one stayed on his shoulder, the other wandered around.

The old man unnerved Bjarke , the way he stared at him with that one eye. It was like somebody shoved a blade through his heart. It was like the old man was saying something, but Bjarke couldn't grasp it. He would just stand there like a man hypnotized until the old man looked away in frustration.

Everyone was staring at Bjarke and he wanted to pluck out everyone's head for it. It wasn't his fault that he yelled at Gunnar and it wasn't his fault that the old man had a powerful grasp over his friend. And it certainly wasn't his fault that he was now banished from the group. He grunted as he tied a firm knot on his food bag. He placed it over his shoulder, picked up his ax and went away, guided by the moon.

Far back in the camp, Odin stood watching Bjarke. He looked like an Ice giant wading his way through the sea of bushes under the moonlight. Odin sighed and went back to his tent. Thinking, all the while, how would he tell Gunnar to kill his own soul brother.

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